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AUTHENTIC PARTICULARS
OF THE DEATH OF
LIEUT. THOMAS BOYD,
OF THE RIFLE CORPS,
IN THE BORDER WARS OF THE
AMERICAN REVOLUTION,
WHO WAS PUT TO DEATH BY THE INDIANS
IN THE MOST CRUEL MANNER,
AT "LITTLE BEARD'S TOWN,"
(NOW CALLED LEICESTER.)

ROCHESTER, N. Y.

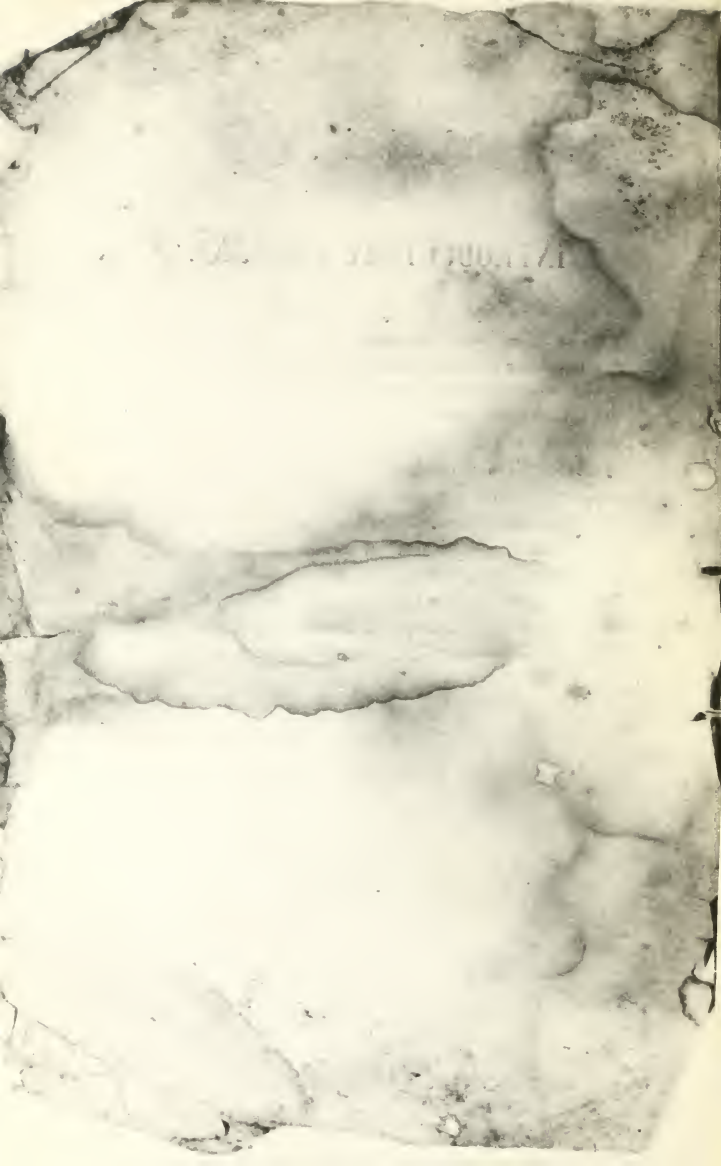
BY RODERICK M. COLTON,

1841.

Authentic

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

Those in any degree conversant with the history of the American Revolution ; with the " Last War," and with the comparatively uninterrupted border skirmishes with the numerous Indian tribes, will not, of course, anticipate an attempt at even a succinct view of so much as one battle, much less of one of those mighty and protracted revolutions and struggles. Neither will the considerate reader look for so much as a *sketch* of the lives of any one of those brave and rare patriots whose " spirits honest indignation felt," and who lived, and fought, and died in " times, that tried men's souls," in a pamphlet the dimensions of this. • He can reasonably anticipate to find no more nor less than what we trust he will find, viz.-a graphic, authentic, though somewhat brief account of the horrible and most barbarous murder of the much lamented LEUTENANT BOYD.



HORRIBLE DEATH OF LIEUT. THOMAS BOYD.

Boyd was Lieutenant of the Rifle Corps in the border war of the American revolution, from ——— until his cruel death by the ruthless savages, on the 13th of September, 1779, which took place at a place *then* called "Little Beard's Town," in honor of a young chief by that name, but *now* called Leicester, during General Sullivan's famous campaign into that large portion of the state of New-York, which was then more distinctly known by the appellation of the "Seneca Country."

It will not be expected that we would in this little narrative, attempt to give the biography or history of the subject of these pages. Suffice it to say, therefore, in relation to the life and character of Lieut. Thomas Boyd, that it was, like his death, triumphantly honorable. He was a native of Northumberland county, Pennsylvania.

We will not so far deviate from our design in this pamphlet, as to follow Gen. Sullivan and his army from the Hudson river to the Seneca Country—in his skirmishes, engagements, councils and negotiations with the different tribes: but we will pass more immediately to the death of Boyd and the painfully interesting circumstances attending it.

The American Army under Gen. Sullivan, after having passed through the country bordering the Seneca Lake, and taken Kanadaseagen, Gotteseunquagan, Schoyere & other Indian villages, with various plantations in their immediate neighborhood, passed on to Canandaigua, and from thence to Honeoye. From Honeoye the army prepared to advance upon the yet more considerable town of Genesee—the then great capital of the Western tribes of the confederacy—containing their stores, and their broadest cultivated fields.

The Indians having heard of Sullivan's continued advance, and of his purpose to strike their towns upon the Genesee, began to think of giving battle. A council of their towns was convened, the result of which was a

determination to intercept the invaders, and strike another blow in defence of their homes. Having made preparations, the warriors took the field again—selecting for their battle ground a position between Honeoye Creek and the head of Connessius Lake.* The result however, of this engagement, was not sufficiently important to claim a notice in this connexion.

From Honeoye General Sullivan advanced in two days upon a town containing twenty-five houses, called Kanaglesaws. There were large corn fields to be destroyed here also, & a bridge to be constructed over an unfordable creek intervening between Kanaglesaw and Little Beard's Town, lying next west in the route to Genesee. While delayed by these obstacles Lieutenant Boyd, of the Rifle Corps, was detached with twenty-six men to reconnoitre that Chieftain's town, where also was a castle. Having performed that duty, and in doing so killed and scalped two Indians,† in the otherwise deserted village, he had commenced his return to the main division. It so happened that Boyd was passing at no great distance from the party of Indians having an Oneida prisoner in charge whom they had taken from Sullivan in the engagement immediately previous between Honeoye Creek and the head of Connessius Lake. The prisoner was guarded by two Indians, between whom he was walking arm in arm, when, at a favorable moment, he suddenly broke from their grasp, and fled at the top of his speed in the direction of Sullivan's army. The Indians in goodly numbers, turned out in pursuit, and while running, fell in with the party of Lieutenant Boyd.‡ By this time the Indians in pursuit of the fugitive, numbered several hundred, under the immediate command of Joseph Brant, a celebrated Indian warrior and chief, who seems suddenly to have made his appearance for the occasion.|| Indeed, according to one authority, Brant was

* At or near a place now called Henderson's Flatts. Vide, life of Mary Jemison, and letter of John Salmon.

† Captain Fowler's Journal. One of these Indians was shot and scalped by Murphy, whose name will be found in the enlarged history of those scenes in connexion with the Schoharie wars.

‡ See life of Mary Jemison.

|| Captain Fowler and John Salmon, state the number of Indians killed to his ally at upwards of five hundred.

not concerned with the pursuit, but had previously secreted himself in a deep ravine, with a large party of his Indians and Butler's rangers, for the express purpose of cutting off Boyd's retreat.* Discovering his situation, and in fact surrounded by fearful odds, Boyd saw, of course, that his only chance of escape was to strike at some given point, and cut his way through the ranks of the enemy. It was a bold measure; but there was no alternative, and he made three successive attempts to accomplish his purpose. In the first, several of the enemy fell, without the loss of a single man on his own part. But he was repulsed. The Indians stood their ground nobly; and in the second and third attempts upon their lines by Boyd, his *whole party fell except himself and eight others!* In the next moment *several of these were killed*, while a few succeeded in flight—among whom was the bold Virginian, Murphy. Boyd was himself taken prisoner, and one other man named Parker. The Lieutenant immediately solicited an interview with Thayendagea, and making himself known as a freemason, was assured by the chief of protection.† One of the party under Lieutenant Boyd was a brave Oneida warrior, named Honyerry, who served him as a guide. This faithful Indian had served long with the Americans, and, was particularly distinguished in the battle of Oriskany, where so many of the Mohawk and Seneca warriors fell. On the present occasion, moreover, he acquitted himself with signal courage. Being an excellent marksman, his rifle did great execution. The Indians knew him, and as they closed in upon the little band, poor Honyerry was literally hacked to pieces.‡ It was a dear victory, however, to the enemy. The firing was so close before the brave party was destroyed, that the powder of the enemy's muskets was driven into their flesh. The enemy had no covert, while Boyd's party was, for a portion of the time at least, possessed of a very advantageous one. The enemy were, moreover, so long employed in removing their dead, that the approach of General Hand's brigade obliged them to leave one of

* See John Salmon's letter.

† See John Salmon's letter.

‡ See John Salmon's letter.

the number among the dead riflemen ; together with a waggon load of packs, blankets, hats, and provisions, which they had thrown off to enable them to act with more agility in the field.*

From the battle field Brant conducted Lieutenant Boyd and his fellow captive, to Little Beard's Town, where they found Col. Butler, with a detachment of the rangers. While under the supervision of Brant, the Lieutenant was well treated and safe from danger.— But the chief being called away in the discharge of his multifarious duties, Boyd was left with Butler, who soon after began to examine him by questions as to the situation, numbers, and intentions of General Sullivan and his troops. He, of course, declined answering all improper questions ; whereat, Butler threatened that if he did not give him full and explicit information, he would deliver him up to the "tender mercies" of the Indians. Relying confidently upon the assurances of the generous Mohawk chieftain, Boyd still refused, and *Butler fulfilled his bloody threat*—delivering him over to Little Beard and his clan, the most ferocious of the Seneca tribe.† The gallant fellow was immediately put to death by *torture* ; and in the execution there was a refinement of cruelty, of which it is not known that a parallel instance occurred during the whole war ! Having been denuded, Boyd was tied to a sapling, where the Indians first practised upon the steadiness of his nerves by hurling their tomahawks apparently at his head, but so as to strike the trunk of the sapling as near to his head as possible without hitting it—groups of Indians, in the meantime, brandishing their knives, and dancing around him with the most frantic demonstrations of joy. His nails were pulled out, his nose cut off, and one of his eyes plucked out. His tongue was also cut out, and he was stabbed in various places.‡—After amusing themselves sufficiently in this way, a small incision was made in his abdomen, and the end of one of his intestines taken out and fastened to the tree.

* Sullivan's official account.

† Letter of Salmon. There is some reason to doubt which of the Butlers was the actors in this instance, the father, Col. John, or the more severe Captain, his son.

‡ Sullivan's official account.

The victim was then unbound, and driven round the tree by brute force, until his intestines had all been literally drawn from his body and wound round its trunk. His sufferings were then terminated by striking his head from his body. It was then raised upon a pole in triumph. Parker, the other captive, was likewise beheaded, but not otherwise tortured.* After the conclusion of this tragedy, the Indians held a brief council to determine whether to offer any further resistance to General Sullivan, or to yield their country to his ravages without opposition. They finally came to the decision that they were not sufficiently powerful to oppose the invaders with success, and thereupon decided to leave their possessions, for the preservation of their lives and those of their families. The women and children were thereupon sent away in the direction of Niagara, while the warriors remained in the forests about Little Beard's Town, to watch the motions of the Americans.†

As soon as the main division had heard of the situa-

* "The Tories, who often commanded the Indians, were the most barbarous. There is a story told of an act in a settlement adjoining Schoharie, which, for the honor of humanity, would not be believed were it not supported by undoubted testimony. A party of Indians had entered a house, and killed and scalped a mother and a large family of children. They had just completed their work of death when some royalists belonging to their party came up, and discovered an infant still alive in the cradle. An Indian warrior noted for his barbarity, approached the cradle with his uplifted hatchet. The babe looked up in his face and smiled; the feelings of nature triumphed over the ferocity of the savage, the hatchet fell from his hand, and he was in the act of stooping down to take the infant in his arms, when one of the royalists cursing the Indian for his humanity, took it up on the point of his bayonet and holding it up struggling in the agonies of death, exclaimed—'this too is a rebel!' " Horrible as is this tale, it finds a parallel among the atrocities perpetrated by Ebenezer Allen, the tory, otherwise known as "Indian Allen," who built the first mill and owned the "Hundred Acre Lot" where Rochester was afterward laid out.

† Life of Mary Jemison. According to Colonel Butler's statement, after his examination Bord was sent forward to Niagara; but, while passing through Genesee village, an old Indian rushed out and tomahawked him. But Salmon says he was put to death by the most cruel tortures and so says the official report of Gen. Sullivan. Mary Jemison, who was with the Indians, gives the details from which the present account is drawn. It is to be hoped however that Colonel Butler was not accessory to the cruelty; and in justice to his memory, it must be admitted that it was not a transaction characteristic of

tion of Boyd, they moved forward—arriving, however, only in season to bury the bodies of the slain.* This tragic occurrence took place on the 13th of September. On the same day Sullivan moved forward to a place called Gathsegwarohare, where the enemy, both Indians and rangers, were apparently disposed to make a stand. The troops were immediately brought into order of battle, and General Clinton's brigade commenced a movement with a view of outflanking and gaining the enemy's rear. But discovering the movement, the enemy retreated with precipitation. Sullivan encamped on the ground—the men sleeping on their arms, in the expectation of an attack. But the enemy did not disturb their repose; and on the 14th the army continued its advance, and crossed the Genesee River. Arriving at Little Beard's Town,† they found the mutilated bodies of Boyd and Parker, which were buried on the bank of Beard's Creek, under a clump of wild plum trees.‡

The valley of the Genesee, for its beauty and fertility, was beheld by the army of Sullivan with astonishment and delight. Though an Indian country, and peopled only by the wild men of the woods, its rich intervals presented the appearance of long cultivation, and were then smiling with their harvests of ripening corn. Indeed, the Indians themselves professed not to know when or by whom the lands upon that stream were first brought into cultivation. Nearly half a century before, Mary Jenison had observed a quantity of human bones washed down from the banks of the river, which the Indians held were not the remains of their own people, but of a different race of men who had once possessed that country. The Indians, they contended, had never buried their dead in such a situation. Be all this however as it may, instead of a howling wilderness, Sullivan and his troops found the Genesee Flatts, and many other districts of the country, resembling much more the orchards, and farms, and gardens of civilized life. But all was now doomed to speedy devastation. The Genesee Castle was destroyed. The troops scoured

* They were buried at a place called Groveland, where the grave may now be seen.

† The place is now called Leicester.

‡ On the road now running from Moscow to Genesee.

the whole region round about, and burnt and destroyed every thing that came in their way. Little Beard himself had officiated as master of ceremonies at the torturing of Born; and his town was now burnt to the ground, and large quantities of corn, which his people had laid up in store, were destroyed by being burnt or thrown into the river. "The town of Genesee contained one hundred and twenty-eight houses, mostly large and very elegant. It was beautifully situated, almost encircled with a clear flatt. extending a number of miles; over which extensive fields of corn were waving, together with every kind of vegetable that could be conceived."* But the entire army was immediately engaged in destroying it, and the axe and the torch soon transformed the whole of that beautiful region from the character of a garden to a scene of drear and sickening desolation. And;

But we have digressed, and must not pursue the history of those scenes, but return by observing that the bones of the patriotic, the firm, the brave, the indomitable, the immortal Born which now repose "on the bank of Beard's Creek, under a clump of wild plum trees," are, through the worthy suggestions and exertions of various gentlemen of Western New York, to be dis-interred, removed to and deposited in the romantic Cemetry of Mount Hope, near the city of Rochester, N. Y. where we doubt not, some substantial and appropriate index of his final resting place will be reared by the
blessings, in ob-
tainin
ly died.

gether useless or uninteresting at this particular crisis, when the attention of the public every where, and especially in Western New York, is being called to the man, his death, and the removal of his remains. And the more especially since the facts which we have briefly delineated are not alike accessible to all, and even if they were, through the medium of circulating libraries, etc. the cost of a perusal would far exceed that of this pamphlet, which all may easily obtain, easily read, easily understand, and easily preserve.

Before concluding we would observe that in addition to the authorities which we have already quoted, we are also indebted to the "Life of Joseph Brant—Thayendanegea," by W. L. Stone, for facts related in the foregoing pages.

